



Malay youth entrepreneurship in Malaysia: An empirical update

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Abstract

Youth entrepreneurship figures prominently in the development agendas of many developing countries including Malaysia. This paper offers a glimpse into what empirically constitutes contemporary Malaysian youth entrepreneurship through an analysis of the findings of a field research involving 531 youth entrepreneurs located in the country's Klang Valley. The aim is to arrive at a general profiling of the youths in terms of personality traits, socio-economic background, nature of business activities and level of enterprise development. The study found that Malaysian youth entrepreneurs were mostly Malay males, aged between 25 and 40, had an upper secondary and university education, married, and possessed the normal business attributes of willingness to take risk, to work hard, to continually learn, and to be undaunted by challenges. They had participated in at least a business course and were running enterprises they built rather than inherited. Their enterprises, mainly of the sole proprietorship type and set more for selling goods than services, had been running for the past one to ten years. They started with less than RM50,000 (USD 15,000) initial capital, employed up to seven male and female employees, and were at a moderate development stage at the time of the study. The paper concludes that the insights this study had furnished qualify, if not contradict, the stereotype long held about the relative inability of Malays to participate in competitive modern business, and may thus help agencies concerned with the economic development of the nation's youths to finetune their intervention strategies.

Keywords: business personality traits, enterprise development, entrepreneurship, Malaysia, proprietorship, youths

Introduction

Issues of unemployment in the local economy amidst current uncertainties in global market demand and economic crisis situations have led to the need for any society or its communities at large to find opportunities in self-employment, including by the youths (Chigunta, 2001; Schoof, 2006). The current limited career options and lack of independence in wage employment have prompted efforts to seek greener pastures in self-employment in the form of entrepreneurial ventures. Youths have increasingly responded to this challenge, including the ones in Malaysia.

In Malaysia, the level of youth engagement in self-employment or entrepreneurship is not as high as one would imagine and expect. Nonetheless, youth entrepreneurial efforts are lauded by the government and society, especially in these current times of economic crisis. Prominent governmental actors such as the Ministry of Youth and Sports Malaysia and The Institute of Youth Development Research Malaysia (*Institute Penyelidikan Pembangunan Belia Malaysia/IPPBM*) organise various programmes, training, research and other activities pertaining to youth development, for example entrepreneurship. The government also organises entrepreneurship programme in schools, public universities and through various public youth organisations aim to cultivate entrepreneurship potentials among the young people (Ninth Malaysia Plan, 2006). About RM5.4 billion has been allocated in the Ninth Malaysia Plan (RMK 9) by the government for youth development through various youth skills training and leadership (Ninth Malaysia Plan, 2006).

Financial, institutional and cultural challenges and problems in the process of business start-ups and progression do not appear to daunt the youths indicating that interest in entrepreneurship may be strong among the youths. According to a recent study on youth index scores of 4673 Malaysian youths by IPPBM, the youths are found to have a relatively high score of 63.3 for entrepreneurial potential and interest (IPPBM, 2008: 7 & 12). The level of interest is said to have increased from the score of 51.6 in 2006. In 2008, those youths continue to express their interest and desire to acquire skills to increase career possibilities, namely those entrepreneurial in nature. Although small in number, some of the youth entrepreneurs are successful innovative entrepreneurs or the very least, as small-scale business proprietors. Such youths may then serve as role models for other youths who are contemplating on business ventures. They may even change the mindsets of many more other youths who have negative perceptions of entrepreneurship.

According to several literatures, entrepreneurs possess particular personality traits, socio-economic characteristics, and particular nature of business enterprise activities and enterprise development process (Bolton & Thompson, 2004; Bird, 1989; Bjerke, 2007; Shane, 2003; McClelland, 1961; Maimunah Ismail, 2001; Noor Rahamah Hj. Abu Bakar *et al.*, 2007, Chan Kim Ling *et al.*, 2006; Md Nor Othman *et al.*, 2005). Youths are also argued to possess some characteristics similar to the ones possessed by adult and matured entrepreneurs (see Chigunta, 2001:27-31; Schoof, 2006). The identified characteristics are said to distinguish the entrepreneurs from non-entrepreneurs.

In Malaysia, youths who have been identified as entrepreneurs have decided on entrepreneurship at the expense of other career options and are able to survive in this current economic crisis. This paper presents the findings of a field study of 531 youth entrepreneurs located in the Klang Valley in Malaysia (see Chan *et al.*, 2009). The aim to shed some ideas on the nature of youth entrepreneurship, and by implications provide some explanations on the possible means to alleviate the problem of lack of entrepreneurship and unemployment among the Malaysian youths.

Data and method

The study of 531 youths was mainly quantitative in nature (see Chan Kim Ling *et al.*, 2009). Data collection was carried through a survey of the youths located in various parts of Klang Valley, Malaysia. The findings presented in this paper were analysed using descriptive statistical analysis aided by the computer software SPSS and the results displayed in frequency and percentile forms.

The main units of analysis of the study were youths entrepreneurs aged between 18-40 years old. This was based on the age range of Malaysian youths defined by the 1997 National Youth Development Policy (*Dasar Pembangunan Belia Negara*) and the 2007 Youth Development and Organisation Act (*Akta Pertubuhan dan Pembangunan Belia 2007*). The youths, regardless of gender and ethnicity, were involved in various kinds of business sectors ranging from retail to services. The duration of business involvement and sustainability is between 1-20 years.

There was no statistical sampling frame to select the youths as purposive and snowballing sampling methods were used for practical reasons. This was the most suitable method to select a sample whose nature was confined to particular restricted research requirements, i.e. youth entrepreneurs whose age ranged only between 18-40 years. Moreover, these sampling methods were suitable for selecting youths who were at times difficult to locate and uncooperative.

The findings

In general, the concepts of “entrepreneur”, “entrepreneurship” and “youth entrepreneurship” outlined earlier were operationalised through findings which pertained to the personal and business profiles of the youth entrepreneurs selected.

Personal profile

Particular aspects of the personal profile which were the focus of the study include gender, age,

ethnicity, marital status, level of education, types of jobs before involvement in business, and possession of personal traits and level of importance of the possession of business traits. Therefore, this profile encompassed some personality traits and aspects of socio-economic background. The following paragraphs and tables in this subsection describe and discuss the findings (see also Chan Kim Ling *et al.*, 2009).

Around 63.14% (n=334) of the sample consist of male youth enterprise owners, and 36.86% (n=195) consisted of female business owners. Table 1 reveals this finding. The average age of entrepreneurs was 38 years. The youngest business operator was 18 years old and the oldest 40 years old (Table 2). The youth entrepreneurs studied were mainly local Malays. A very large majority (82.26%, n=436) of the selected entrepreneurs were of Malay ethnicity while the remaining youths (12.64%, n=67) were of Chinese ethnicity followed by the Indians (Table 3). More than 73% (n=389) of the entrepreneurs were married, 25% (n=133) were single and the rest were either divorced or widowed (Table 4).

Table 1. Distribution by gender

Gender	Number	Percent
Male	334	63.14
Female	195	36.86
Female	195	36.86
Total	529	100
Missing	3	

Source: Chan *et al.*, 2009

Table 2. Age of entrepreneurs

Age	Number	Percent
18 – 25	70	13.67
26 – 30	132	25.78
31 – 35	154	30.08
36 – 40	156	30.47
Total	512	100
Missing	20	

Source: Chan *et al.*, 2009

Table 3. Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Number	Percent
Malay	436	82.26
Chinese	67	12.64
Indian	20	3.77
Others	7	1.32
Total	530	100
Missing	2	

Source: Chan *et al.*, 2009

Table 4. Marital status

Marital status	Number	Percent
Married	389	73.53
Not married	133	25.14
Divorced/ widowed	7	1.32
Total	529	100
Missing	3	

Source: Chan *et al.*, 2009

The level of education was high among the youth entrepreneurs selected for the study. All of them were literate with only about 1% (n=6) of the respondents completed primary (6th grade) school education. About 4.3% (n=23) completed lower secondary education while 43% (n=230) completed upper secondary high school education up to SPM level. Eighteen percent (n=98) and 33% (n=172) of the respondents have college (STPM or matriculation) and university education, respectively. This general lower illiteracy level must be considered in planning any entrepreneurship programme (Table 5).

Table 5. Level of education

Level of education	Number	Percent
Primary school (UPSR)	6	1.13
Junior High school (PMR)	23	4.35
Secondary High school (SPM/SPVM)	230	43.48
College (STPM/Matriculation)	98	18.53
University	172	32.51
Total	529	100
Missing	3	

Source: Chan *et al.*, 2009

Entrepreneurial traits

Table 6 and Figure 1 demonstrates the entrepreneurial traits of the youths. A large majority of the respondents, 429 or 80.8% said they possessed a high and very high level of motivation and desire to achieve something while 3.4% (n=18) said they possessed a low and very low level of motivation and desire to achieve something. About 15.8% (n=84) said they have moderate level of such trait in them. 443 persons or 83.5% respondents said they possessed a very high and high level of determination and perseverance while 4.1% (n=22) said their determination and perseverance were of a low and very low level. Some 12.4% (n=66) said they had a moderate level of such trait in them.

Nearly eighty-four percent of the respondents (n=451) said they possessed a very high and high level of self-esteem while 4.1% persons (n=22) said otherwise. In between 10.9% respondents (n=58) said they had a moderate level of such trait in them. About 73.3% (n=389) respondents said they had a very high and high level of risk-taking disposition but only 7.3% (n=39) persons said their risk-taking attitude was low or very low. 19.4% (n=103) persons said they have a moderate level of such trait in them. As for the trait of initiative and responsibility, 68.5% (n=364) respondents said they possess a very high and high level of such trait. Only 8.5% (n=45) respondents said they have a low and very low level of initiative and responsible attitude. 23% (n=122) persons said they have moderate level of such trait in them.

About 79.7% (n=423) respondents said they make a very high and high level of effort to seek opportunity while 6.1% (n=32) respondents said they only make a low and very low level of such effort. 14.3% (n=76) persons said they have a moderate level of such trait in them. Another trait possessed by the respondents is the ability for forward thinking and goal orientation. 63.9% (n=339) persons said they have a high and very high level of such ability. Only 12.1% (n=64) persons said their ability is of a low and very low level. 24.1% (n=128) persons said they have moderate level of such trait in them.

Sixty-five percent (n=345) persons said they have a high and very high level of creativity and innovation while 15.4% (n=82) persons said they have a low and very low level of creativity and innovation. 19.6% (n=104) persons said they have moderate level of such trait in them. Honesty and integrity is another trait possessed by a large majority of the respondents. 85.4% (n=453) persons said they have a high and very high level of such trait in them. But 5.4% (n=29) persons said the opposite that is they had a low and very low level of such trait. 9.2% (n=49) persons said they have moderate level of such trait in them.

Around 80.2% (n=426) respondents said they have a high and very high level of sociability while 6.6% (n=35) persons said they have a low and very low level of such trait. 13.2% (n=70) persons said they have moderate level of such trait in them. Finally, for the possession of locus of control over business, 70.6% (n=375) respondents said they have a high and very high level of

control over their businesses. Only 16.2% (n=86) persons admit they have a low and very low level of such trait. 13.2% persons (n=70) said they have moderate level of such trait in them.

Table 6. Entrepreneurial traits

Types of personal traits	Levels of possession (Number)				
	Very low	Low	Moderate	High	Very high
Motivation to achieve something	15	3	84	261	168
Determination and perseverance	17	5	66	242	201
Self-esteem	16	6	58	210	241
Risk-taking attitude	26	13	103	232	157
Initiative and responsibility	27	18	122	212	152
Effort to seek out opportunity	21	11	76	234	189
Forward thinking and goal orientation	29	35	128	200	139
Creativity and Innovation	41	41	104	223	122
Honesty and integrity	24	5	49	218	235
Sociability	28	7	70	238	188
Locus of control over business	51	35	70	203	172

Source: Chan *et al.*, 2009

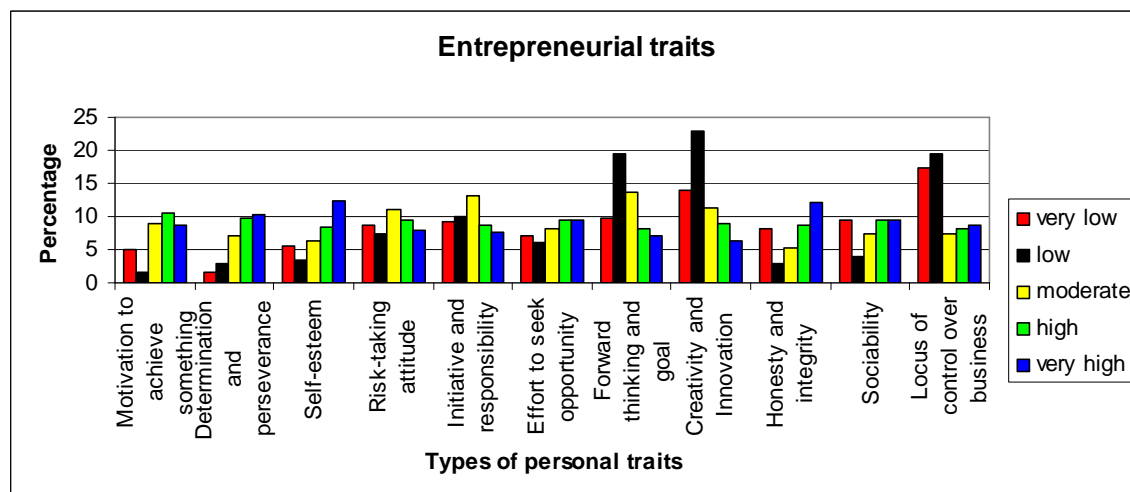


Figure 1. Entrepreneurial traits

Business profile

Aspects of business profile focused by the study were types of business activities, status of business organisation, start-up capital, number of employees, participation of business training/course/programme, duration of business and present expansion of business. Table 7a, Figure 2a, Table 7b and Figure 2b present the frequencies of all the major types of businesses the youth entrepreneur respondents were involved in. A total of 49 types of trade were embarked upon by the youth entrepreneurs, suggesting the diverse range of their businesses. The majority of the businesses undertaken at the time of the study by the youth entrepreneurs were in the retailing of goods (60%, n=321) as compared to 40% (n=210) in services. Overall a substantial number of youths were involved in conventional trade such as sundry and minimarket (17.89%, n=95) followed by clothing shop (7.34%, n=39), both in the goods trade. The next major trade was the photocopying and printing service (6.59%, n=35) followed by motor services (5.46%, n=29).

Table 7a. Current major types of businesses (Goods)

Major types of goods business	Number	Percent
Sundry shop/mini market	95	17.89
Household goods	1	0.19
Textile and Fabric	8	1.51
Clothes shop	39	7.34
Carpet shop	2	0.38
Shoe shop	2	0.38
Leather goods, handbag and luggage	3	0.56
Health products, cosmetics and personal hygiene	21	3.95
Personal accessories shop	1	0.19
Optical shop	3	0.56
Biscuits, cake and bakery	6	1.13
Stationary	8	1.51
Book shop	7	1.32
Florist shop	3	0.56
Handicraft shop	6	1.13
Pharmacy	3	0.56
Sports and recreation	3	0.56
Furniture shop	7	1.32
Lighting shop	3	0.56
Steel and construction goods	8	1.51
Home decor (kitchen and toilet)	9	1.69
Optical shop, glass and frames	1	0.19
Computer accessories and goods	20	3.77
Telecommunications	15	2.82
Electrical goods	5	0.94
Car accessories	1	0.19
Fruits and vegetables, seafood and chicken	14	2.64
Trading import export	2	0.38
Religious products	1	0.19
Bicycle	1	0.19
Children toys	1	0.19
TOTAL	321	60.46

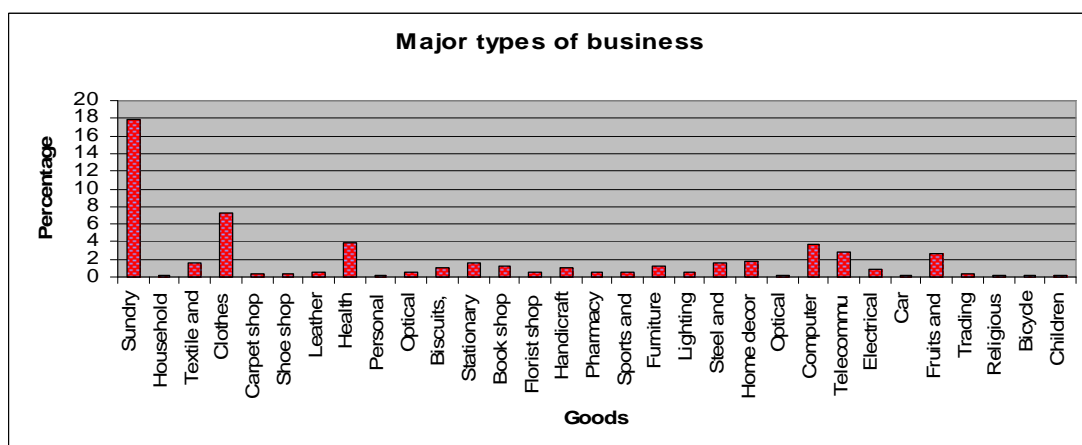


Figure 2a. Major types of business (Goods)

Table 7b. Current major types of businesses (Services)

Major types of services business	Number	Percent
Food and beverages	22	4.14
Personal services	26	4.90
Photoshop	3	0.56
Photostat and printing	35	6.59
Electrical services	5	0.94
Motor services	29	5.46
Education service	9	1.69
Finance service	5	0.94
Home décor service	7	1.32
Laundry service (dobby)	27	5.08
Telecommunication service, ICT, Computer	12	2.26
Contractor, welding	10	1.88
Transport/lorry	1	0.19
Advertising	4	0.75
Stockist/distributor	2	0.38
Tailor shop/tailoring	25	4.71
Health services	2	0.38
Other Services	8	1.51
TOTAL	210	39.54

Source: Chan et al., 2009

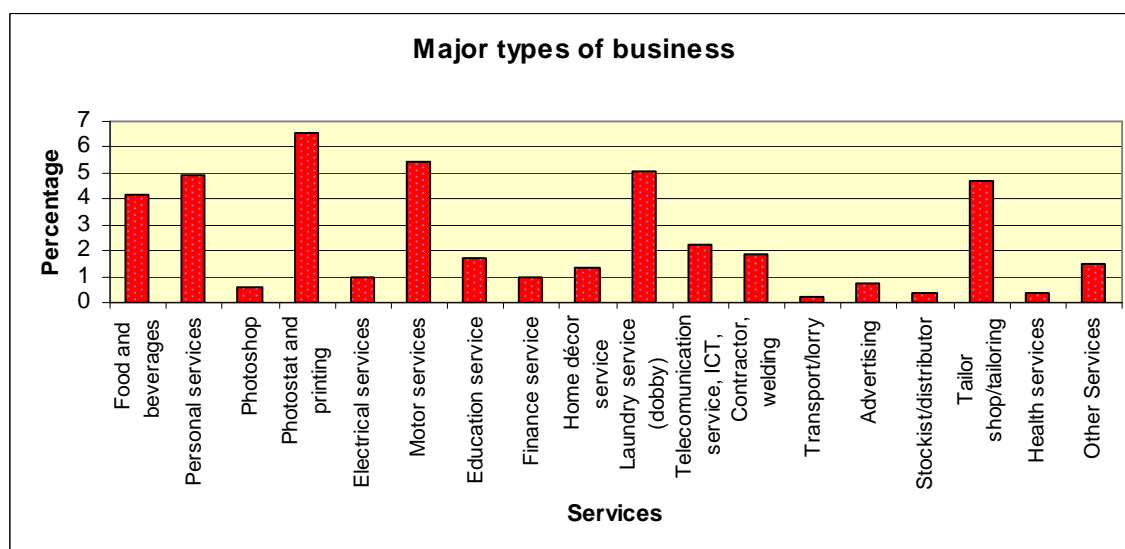


Figure 2b. Major types of business (Services)

Figure 3 illustrates aspects of the youths' enterprises that pertain to origin, duration, type, and initial capital size. With regard to the origin of their enterprises, the majority of the youth entrepreneurs, i.e. 88.19% (n=463), declared that their businesses were not inherited businesses as compared to 11.81% (n= 62) who reported that their businesses were inherited (Table 8).

Table 8. Inherited business

Inherited business	Number	Percent
Yes	62	11.81
No	463	88.19
Total	525	100
Missing	7	

Source: Chan *et al.*, 2009

With regard to the duration of their enterprises, the majority of the respondents (48%, n=208) owned businesses that were between 1 to 4 years old, 36% (n=155) between 5 to 9 years old and 11% (n=47) between 10-14 years old. Only a small minority owned enterprises above 15 years of age (Table 9).

Table 9. Duration of business

Duration of business (years)	Number	Percent
1 – 4	208	48.71
5 – 9	155	36.30
10 – 14	47	11.01
15 – 19	8	1.87
> 20	9	2.11
Total	427	100
Missing	105	

Source: Chan *et al.*, 2009

In terms of the type of business organization (Table 10), the highest proportion of youth businesses was those of sole proprietorship (70.94%, n=376) with more women proprietorship (73.2%) than men (69.5%). The second highest proportion were those of partnerships at 21.89% (n=116) with more women in partnership businesses (23.7%) than men (21.0%). The third were those of limited company at 5.47% (n=29) with men more involved in this type of businesses (7.8%) than women (1.5%). This was followed by franchises (1.13%, n=6) and lastly, corporation (0.57%, n=6).

Table 10. Types of business organisation

Types of business	Number	Percent
Sole proprietorship	376	70.94
Partnership	116	21.89
Limited company	29	5.47
Corporation	3	0.57
Franchise	6	1.13
Total	522	100
Missing	10	

Source: Chan *et al.*, 2009

In terms of start-up capital, Table 11 demonstrates that the majority of the youth entrepreneurs started up with a relatively small to medium capital size, where 18.38% (n=93) were in the RM5001-RM10000 category, followed by 16.4% (n=83) in the RM30001-RMRM50000 category, and 15.02% (n=76) in the RM20001-RM30000 category.

With regard to the number of employees, Tables 12 and 13 show that the majority of the male and female employees were hired in the smallest size category of the youths' businesses, registering 70.15% (n=235) and 77.51% (n=262) respectively, with females comprising the larger

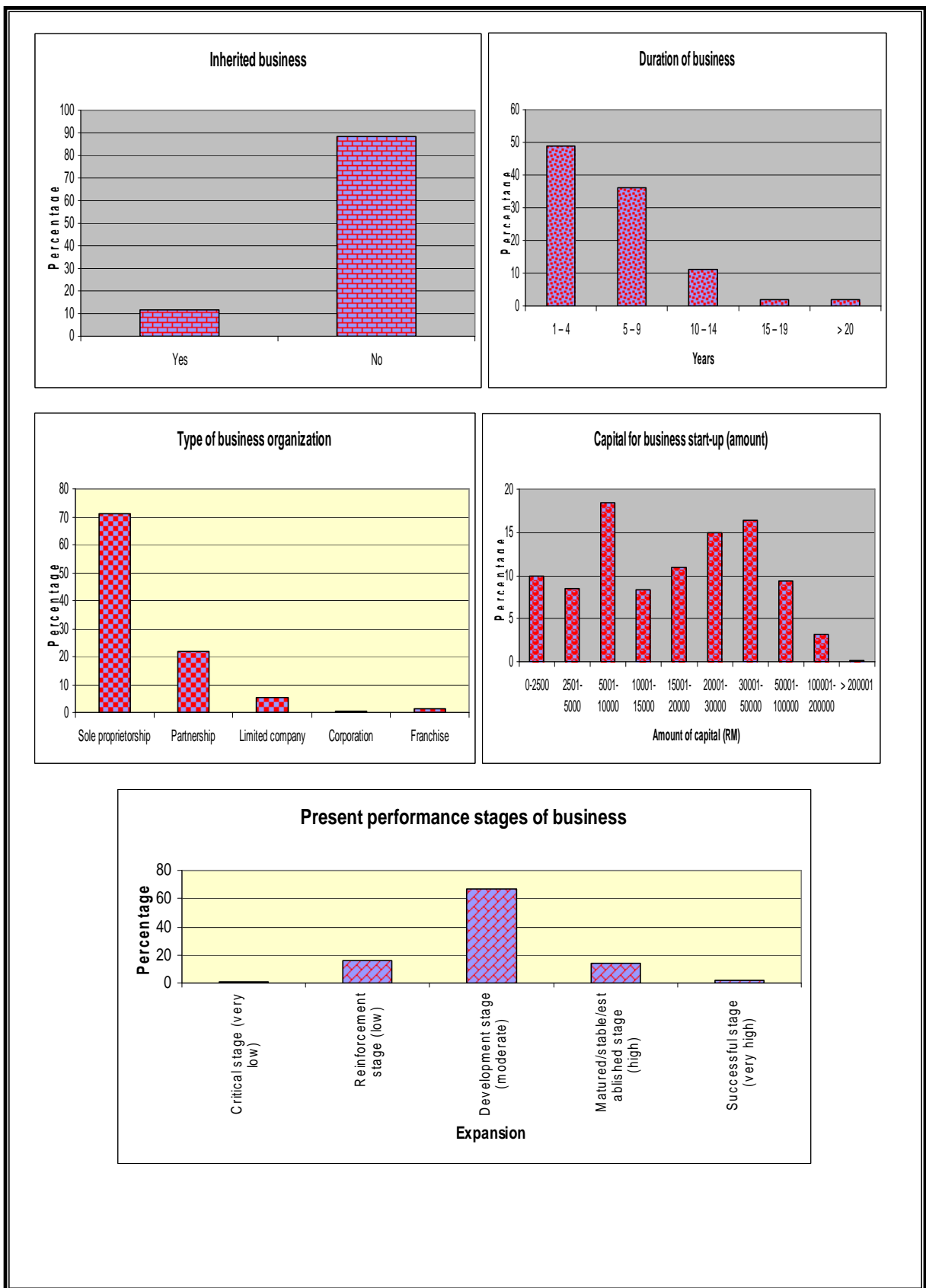


Figure 3. Selected aspects of business

percentage. With larger enterprises male employees predominated at 25.37% (n=85) compared to the female counterparts (19.53%, n=66).

Table 11. Capital for business start-up (amount)

Amount of capital (RM)	Number	Percent
0-2500	50	9.88
2501-5000	43	8.50
5001-10000	93	18.38
10001-15000	42	8.30
15001-20000	55	10.87
20001-30000	76	15.02
30001-50000	83	16.40
50001-100000	47	9.29
100001-200000	16	3.16
> 200001	1	0.20
Total	506	100
Missing	26	

Source: Chan *et al.*, 2009

Table 12. Number of male employees

Male employees	Number	Percent
0-3	235	70.15
4-7	85	25.37
8-11	12	3.58
12-15	2	0.60
>15	1	0.30
Total	335	100
Missing	197	

Source: Chan *et al.*, 2009

Table 13. Number of female employees

Female employees	Number	Percent
0-3	262	77.51
4-7	66	19.53
8-11	9	2.66
12-15	1	0.30
Total	338	100
Missing	194	

Source: Chan *et al.*, 2009

More than half, specifically 62.71% (n=333), of the youth entrepreneurs surveyed reported that they receive formal business knowledge via business training courses or programmes (Table 14). This indicates a significant recognition of professional knowledge and know-how on the part of the youths.

Probing further, the youth entrepreneurs did perceive a number of business knowledge and skills that were highly important when starting and running a business. These ranged from communication, administration, mentoring, motivation, planning, accounting and marketing (Figure 4). They also rated the performance levels of their expenditures and sale revenues for the past five financial years (Figure 5).

Table 14. Participation in business training courses and programmes

Participation in business training	Number	Percent
Yes	333	62.71
No	198	37.29
Total	531	100
Missing	1	

Source: Chan *et al.*, 2009

1. Business communication	86.8%
2. Administrative skills	84.8%
3. Advice from a mentor	84.6%
4. Employee motivation	74.9%
5. Business planning	70.2%
6. Accounting	69.2%
7. Sales and marketing	67.3%

Figure 4. Youth entrepreneurs' perception of highly important business knowledge and skills

The ultimate indicator of the overall performance of the youths as entrepreneurs is the present state of their business health. The youth entrepreneurs were asked to rate their present business performance on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being that the business is at the Critical Stage: it is difficult to continue operating this business, 2 Reinforcement Stage: will continue the business, 3 Development Stage, 4 Matured/Stable/Established Stage and 5 Successful stage. The study found that the majority (66.9%, n=351) of the youth entrepreneurs rated their present business performance at Stage 3, i.e., at the Development Stage. This was followed by 16.0% (n=84) who put it at Stage 2, i.e. the Reinforcement Stage, and 13.9% (n=73) who rated it at the 4th. stage, i.e. Matured/Stable/Established.

<u>Expenditures</u>	
1. Highly increasing and increasing	63.6%
2. Static	27.5%
3. Declining and highly declining	8.7%
8. No answer	0.2%
<u>Expenditures</u>	
1. Highly increasing and increasing	63.3%
2. Static	27.3%
3. Declining and highly declining	9.4%
4. No answer	0.0%

Figure 5. Youth entrepreneurs' rating of their business expenditures and revenues for the past five financial years

Only 2.1% of the youths (n=11) reported their businesses as being at the 5th stage, i.e. Successful Stage. At the other end, only 1.1% (n=6) regarded their businesses as being at the Critical Stage as they felt difficult to continue operating them (Table 15).

Table 15. Present stage of business performance

Stage of business performance	Number	Percent
Critical stage (very low)	6	1.14
Reinforcement stage (low)	84	16.00
Development stage (moderate)	351	66.86
Matured/stable/established stage (high)	73	13.90
Successful stage (very high)	11	2.10
No answer	6	1.12
Total	531	100

Source: Chan *et al.*, 2009

Reading the youth entrepreneurship

The Malay youth entrepreneurs had shown that they possessed particular personality traits and behavioural characteristics which fit McClelland's (1961) description of motivation and emotion as key psychological and social elements that drive people to venture into entrepreneurship. The youths' basis of motivation was human needs for achievement, power and affiliation. It was their spirit of competitiveness, personal satisfaction, monetary benefits and independence that had motivated them to become entrepreneurs and sustain that entrepreneurship (see Bolton & Thompson, 2004). They showed perseverance and determination, and the ability to take calculated risks, initiatives and responsibility. They were goal- and opportunity- orientated, bent on problem solving, and able to retain an internal locus of control.

The youth entrepreneurs also fit Shane's (2003: 4) notion of entrepreneurship as their enterprises involved the discovery, evaluation and exploitation of opportunities to introduce new goods and services, ways of organising, markets, processes, and raw materials through organizing efforts that previously had not existed. Although they were yet to project creativity and innovation as key features of their entrepreneurship as Bjerke (2007) would have insisted the youths did demonstrate the creation of value through the creation of their enterprises (see Bird 1989: 3).

Broadly, the entrepreneurial Malay youths had depicted what Chigunta (2001) terms as "enterprising qualities" in terms of attitudes and behaviours. They were enthusiastic, energetic, vigorous, fresh and reasonably creative.

In other words, there was such a thing as the entrepreneurial spirit among contemporary young Malays. This is a significant observation as for a long time the Malays in Malaysia had been associated with a glaring lack of competitive and enterprising spirit because of which it was thought that they would never belong to the world of modern business (see for example, Winstedt, 1947; Mahathir, 1970; Alatas, 1977).

Conclusion

This paper has provided an overview of the personal and business profiles of 531 Malay youth entrepreneurs operating small-scale businesses in the Klang Valley. Some patterns of commonalities had been observed in the profiles of the youths, especially in terms of particular personality traits, socio-economic background and nature of business activities and development. Although not exhaustive and conclusive, the empirical findings had provided some insight into the characteristics of the contemporary Malay youth entrepreneurs which may well inform current and future thinking on the propensity of young Malays to participate in the competitive arena of modern business.

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